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AUTHOR Bressan, Elizabeth S.
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ABSTRACT

Inherent in all sport, dance, and movement activity are implied patterns of interaction between and among all participants and the relevant characteristics of their environment. Through these patterns children learn various structures of acceptable social behavior as defined by the roles-oriented value system of our culture. Eight different behavior models are intrinsic in physical education. Solitary behaviors are defined as intra- or extra-individual, while cooperative patterns are either aggregate or intragroup in nature. Achievement-oriented patterns may be found at interindividual, unilateral, multilateral, or intergroup levels of competition. Whether children react to inherent or to respondent behavior patterns, educators must consider the social interaction factors in the planning of any physical activity. (LH)

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Multivariate Considerations in Children's Physical Education: Social Interaction

Elizabeth S. Bressan

University of Kentucky

Lexington, Kentucky 40506

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Underlying all children's involvement in their sport, dance or exercise forms of movement, are implied patterns of interaction between and among all participants and the relevant characteristics of their environment. These diverse patterns offer children the opportunity to encounter various structures of social symbolism. Through a progressive assimilation of the stress created by specified relationships, the children have the opportunity to define, practice and hopefully master social interaction skills. Each activity in children's physical education offers both behavioral limitations and behavioral opportunities. Each activity proposes certain standards for successful performance and is accompanied by an environmental setting that suggests certain kinds of behavior. Two distinct kinds of types of social interaction patterns may be noted as instructive for both planning and conducting research in children's physical education. The first type consists of the inherent patterns of social interaction which include all relationships prescribed or demanded by the structure of the activity itself, i.e. patterns which are essential to the occurrence of the activity. The second type of patterns are the respondent patterns of social interaction which include all relationships encouraged or enabled by the activity but which are not a part of its actual structure.

Inherent Patterns

The actual structures of sport, dance and exercise specify certain action/counteraction dialogs between and among all participants and selected aspects of the environment. Participants are assigned roles which usually involve a standard for acceptable performance that carries specific cognitive, motor and interaction expectations. Satisfactory assumption of the role necessitates adequate fulfillment of these expectations. It becomes crucial then, whether in teaching or in conducting research, to define the cognitive, motor and interaction features of any physical education activity in order to understand, facilitate and predict children's behavior in these contexts. Efforts to define the structural properties of physical education activities become schemes for the analysis of the inherent patterns or role expectations of those activities.

Numerous models are evident in the literature that propose formats for defining inherent patterns. Avedon (1971) has suggested a format for the examination of the structural elements of games that could be most useful in the study of the social interaction patterns found in all physical education activities. A modification of his format is submitted in the following explication. This modification groups eight kinds of social

interaction into three separate categories: a solitary category in which an individual is acting essentially alone; a cooperative/ascriptive category in which an individual or group of individuals interact in a positive fashion to facilitate mutual goal attainment; and a competitive/achievement oriented category in which an individual or group of individuals interact in a confronting or conflicting fashion in a goal-oriented situation. It is interesting to note that Sutton-Smith (1971) supports the inclusion of solitary behaviors in a social interaction scheme since elements of imitation and modeling are often present in such behaviors. It is also important to realize that the original Avedon (1971) presentation ordered these social interaction patterns not by category, but rather according to their complexity as determined by the quantity and diversity of interaction within each kind. This complexity level has been included parenthetically in the following:

Solitary Patterns

intra-individual (complexity level 1):
action which involves only mind or mind and body of the participant requiring no interaction with either another person or aspect(s) of the environment.

extra-individual (complexity level 2):
action which involves aspect(s) of the environment requiring no interaction with another person.

Cooperative/Ascriptive Patterns

aggregate (complexity level 3):
action which involves aspect(s) of the environment while in the company of other individuals who are similarly acting on aspect(s) of the environment. Interaction does not directly occur among individuals.

intra-group (complexity level 7):
action which involves two or more persons interacting together in a positive fashion to achieve a mutual goal.

Competitive/Achievement Oriented Patterns

inter-individual (complexity level 4):
action which involves competitive interaction between two individuals.

unilateral (complexity level 5):
simultaneous competitive action which involves three or more persons where one participant is the antagonist.

multi-lateral (complexity level 6):
simultaneous competitive action which involves three or more persons where no one participant is the antagonist.

inter-group (complexity level 8):
simultaneous competitive action which involves two or more intra-groups

The utilization of this explication of the inherent patterns of social interaction in children's physical education is apparent for both planning and research. The recognition and specification of the social demands of a given activity should help the teacher sequence learning experiences in such a way that an assimilation of the social skills demanded within an activity may be mastered as well as the cognitive or motor skills inherent in the role. Curricular decisions might be determined in part by the social complexity or the category of social interaction considered most appropriate for a given group of children. Bateson (1956) has submitted that it is crucial for children's social development that they learn more than just the social interaction patterns inherent in their physical activity structures. He has contended that the most important impact of participation in different kinds of social patterns is the realization of the broad social concept that different types of interactive behaviors are appropriate in different types of contexts. If physical educators assume this direction as one of their instructional goals, then a rigorous effort would have to be organized that would reflect the children's expanding ability to operate on all interaction levels and choose appropriate categories and types of behavior according to the characteristics of a situation.

Prior to any attempts to revise or restructure learning around considerations of inherent social interaction patterns, research efforts must be coordinated that will define the parameters of the social features within the roles assumed by children in their physical education activities. The acknowledgment of a definition of types and categories is but a first step. The cognitive and motor skill prerequisites for effective functioning at each level must be examined - or is there a social interaction prerequisite to the development of certain motor skills - or is a strict concept of "prerequisite" without validity in the integrated process of learning sport, dance and exercise forms? The acceptance of a definitive structure for the social interaction patterns found in children's physical education would be a critical point of departure for responsible research investigations.

Respondent Patterns

While the inherent patterns of social interaction within the role expectations of sport, dance and exercise forms may be lifted from the structural features of those activities, the second type of interaction, respondent patterns, cannot. Respondent patterns are those social interactions encouraged or enabled by the activity structure itself. In these types of patterns children seem to organize their behavior according to broad, even nebulous, social scripts that reflect their cultural orientations and pre-established patterns of interaction with other participants or elements in the activity. These scripts may be viewed as basic attitudes that the children bring with them to the activity. Loy, Birrill, and Rose (1976) have reported that such attitudes seem to be a function of

the age, sex and previous socialization of the individual. Respondent patterns appear to differ cross-culturally and may in fact be a product of the entire setting in which a given activity occurs or which it suggests.

Respondent patterns could be any type of social interaction precipitated by or around a physical education activity. Helping behaviors as well as fighting behaviors would be subsumed under this heading. Some research involving respondent patterns does suggest that if the goals of an activity are challenging, the focus of attention tends to be given to the activity rather than respondent patterns, however, challenging activities may likewise require technical assistance or a need for validation of effort, both of which are types of respondent behavior (Gump and Sutton-Smith, 1971). The only thing clear in this instance is the confusion. There must be different types of respondent behaviors, some of which detract from effective learning in certain situations and others which may have no impact on learning and still others that may facilitate learning. We can be certain, however, that the freedom to interact in both verbal and non-verbal dimensions is apparent in sport, dance and exercise forms. This continuous opportunity for display creates a natural theater for respondent social interaction patterns.

Teachers and researchers together could coordinate their efforts to produce a rough paradigm of respondent behaviors that seem to recur around children's participation in physical education activities. Certain types of inherent patterns may encourage certain types of respondent patterns in children with certain age, sex and previous socialization characteristics. Subsequent to the collection of data regarding these relationships, tentative statements of definition and interaction among the dominant social elements of given situations could be evolved. From these statements predictions could be attempted regarding the respondent social behaviors of children involved in activities with specific inherent social behavior demands. Such information once refined would be invaluable to teachers involved in multicultural situations where the children do not share a cultural background with the teacher. Such information once refined also would contribute substantially to our comprehensive understanding of social behavior.

Summary

The study of social interaction is the study of the inherent and respondent patterns that occur in both a specified and a general social context. Bateson (1956) has suggested the terminology "framing context" rather than role and script, since it implies a range of acceptable social behaviors within a total environmental situation. The framing contexts of children's physical education, then, can be said to constitute a significant impact on the learning of sport, dance and exercise forms. While it is important for the children to learn the criterion behaviors that our common social structure demands and makes available for their assimilation within formally structured educational activities, it is equally important for children to develop a flexibility and tolerance in social interaction with individuals who

may have different needs or come from a different cultural background. Children need to participate in different social interaction forms that require different social skills in order to fully develop their social potential. Every activity in physical education offers children behavioral limitations and opportunities. In order to fulfill the responsibility of limitations along with the autonomy implied by opportunities, children must be able to participate in programs that consider social interaction skills as functional considerations in the planning of activities. To accomplish this task, children's social interaction patterns must be understood through rigorous and sensitive scholarship by those who would teach and conduct research.

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